



2023 Year in Review



JJ TenClay – Refugee Ministries Coordinator

Dear Friends,

In January 2013, my husband, Tim, attended a clergy conference in Rome hosted by the Waldensian & Methodist Church of Italy.

We had no idea that attending this conference would profoundly change our lives and ministry forever.

While speaking to Waldensian leaders during the conference, Tim learned about the growing number of people—primarily from Africa and the Middle East—arriving on the shores of Italy and other European countries after crossing the Mediterranean Sea to find humanitarian protection and refuge in Europe. He also began hearing stories of the large number of people dying on their journeys. When Tim returned home from the conference, he shared some of these stories with me, and by the end of 2013, we had accepted an offer to move to Italy and work with the Waldensian & Methodist church to provide care for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

In 2013, there were approximately 55.2 million people forcibly displaced from their homes worldwide and in need of refuge.

In 2018, as we continued to watch the numbers of refugees and forcibly displaced people grow at an alarming rate, my family and I took another leap of faith and returned to the United States, and I accepted a new role as Refugee Ministries Coordinator for RCA Global Mission.

In 2018, there were approximately 70.8 million people forcibly displaced worldwide.

I had absolutely no idea how God would use me in this new role, and whether or not I would be able to find and keep enough partners willing to support this work, but I knew I had to try. God had placed a call on my life, and my faithful and loving response was “Yes”. After walking alongside people I met during my time in Italy who experienced so much trauma, loss, and dehumanization due to displacement (and other compounding issues), I was all in. The scales had fallen from my eyes. My heart was bursting with sadness and anger as I listened to their stories of displacement and forced migration, and frustration and despair at the obstacles they experienced while in search of refuge. And it was also being mended with love, compassion, joy, and blessing with every glimpse of God I saw in the faces of those I would come to meet, with every obstacle that was removed, every heart that began to heal, and every hand that reached out to help.

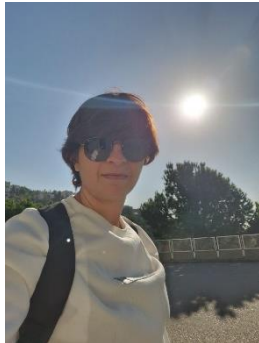
Here we are, ten years since my family said yes to refugee care ministries and five years since the creation of my new role as Refugee Ministries Coordinator. To God be the glory.

Some of the highlights of this ministry in the past five years include:

- \$45,000 raised to rebuild a school for Yazidi children in Northern Iraq that serves around 800 children and their families, equipping them to return home after over six years of forced displacement;
- \$65,000 raised to continue the work of 8 schools for Rohingya refugee children in Myanmar and Bangladesh serving around 600 children and their families;
- More than \$300,000 was raised to evacuate vulnerable Afghans after the fall of Kabul to the Taliban, and provide care for those who were left behind (758 were evacuated from Afghanistan, and more than 5,000 received clean water, food, medical care, and/or protected housing through these efforts);
- Raising funds on an ongoing basis for the RCA Global Mission Refugee Care Crisis Fund, which is used to send emergency funds to respond to global refugee emergencies (these funds have recently been used for emergencies in Ukraine, Sudan, and Lebanon);
- Currently raising \$85,000 to continue the work of providing peacebuilding, social cohesion, and trauma care for South Sudanese refugees living in Uganda (\$65,000 of the \$85,000 raised to date);
- Currently raising emergency funds to support the work of a mission partner in Lebanon who is providing care for thousands of people recently displaced along the Lebanon-Israel border;
- Continue to consult on numerous cases of Afghans who were left behind in Afghanistan or who are stuck in another country without a legal, safe pathway to long-term resettlement and humanitarian protection (including work with 6 different countries exploring resettlement to date);
- Continue to consult on other individuals cases (nationally and internationally) to secure a path to humanitarian protection for refugees and displaced people;
- Created World Refugee Toolkits as resources for pastors and faith leaders to use for worship and teaching for World Refugee Day (June 20), and collaborated with pastors and congregations to host World Refugee Sunday and World Communion Sunday events;
- Created the *Theology of Migration* resource page for the RCA;
- Created and curated the *This is My Story: Migration Storytelling Project* for Faithward;
- Created and curated the *Migration and Immigration Resources* page for Faithward;
- Co-created the *A Meal for Peace for South Sudan* toolkit with Kelli Gilmore (RCA Global Mission staff) and Nancy Smith-Mather (RCA/PCUSA missionary);
- Continue to work with local, national, and international mission partners providing care for refugees and displaced people;

- And continue to work with pastors, elders, deacons, mission teams, congregations, classes, regional synods, RCA staff, RCA missionaries, educational institutions, and beyond, inviting them into the sacred space of caring for refugees and displaced people—locally, nationally, and internationally.

You can find links to most of the resources listed above on my webpage: www.rca.org/tenclay



Thank you! This ministry would not exist and could not continue without your support.

And it is essential that this ministry continues.

In our world today (as of December 2023), more than 130 million are forcibly displaced. This number has increased by more than 60% in the past ten years.

So, my prayer as we end 2023 and begin this 11th year of refugee care ministries is this:

Come, Lord Jesus.

Be with all who suffer due to conflicts and wars, persecution, political and economic corruption and instability, natural and manmade disasters, and so many other factors that lead to mass death and forced displacement.

Heal lands that are currently uninhabitable, heal bodies broken or emaciated, heal hearts that are scarred by trauma and loss, heal minds tormented with thoughts of violence and hatred and division, heal souls that yearn for your peace...peace that surpasses all human understanding.

Help us to see, help us to listen...then help us to act.

We know that we can't do everything and serve everyone. But we can do much more than we imagine and can serve many more than we are because when you call, you equip.

Let our hearts and minds and voices and actions serve as daily reminders to us and the world that there is a redeemer and sustainer.

Yet we, as the faithful, are called to live in this "already, but not yet" existence, knowing that you have already conquered sin and death, but that we live in a current reality of growing pain, suffering, and lack of peace and wholeness.

Help us to see, help us to listen...then help us to act.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Amen.